

“Changed”
John 20

There is transforming power in perspective.

Knowing **the truth** makes all the difference in the world in the way we see life and respond to it.

Imagine that you are in a large department store with your three-year-old.

You are in a hurry and you are trying to find the right size for a pair of jeans you wish to purchase.

When you look to make certain your three-year-old is still beside you – you panic – he’s not there.

The fear that grips you is almost palpable.

Your body goes on full alert, your eyes dart near and far, and your mind rushes to the worst conclusions.

With people all around and clothing racks obscuring your view, your visual perspective is limited – you can’t see what has happened to your child.

Then you move to get a different view of the store and you see something that totally changes you.

One simple fact totally alters your feelings – alters everything.

You see your spouse who has unexpectedly come into the store and with her is your three-year-old.

A simple truth, a change in perspective completely changes our feelings from great fear to complete relief.

There is transforming power in perspective.

Knowing the truth makes all the difference in the world in the way we see life and respond to it.

Most of us here have known something of deep sadness, or fear, or skepticism.

Enough experiences have happened to us in our years to leave us with difficult memories of the hard side of life.

If you have ever lost someone you truly loved it wouldn't take much to scratch the scab covering your grief and make you feel again the sadness and pain you have felt so many times before.

If you have ever been without work for a long time and have felt the fear that goes with wondering if you can ever support your family again – it wouldn't take much to put you back in touch with those same fears.

If you have ever had doubts about your relationship with God, then you know something of the feelings of skepticism that arise when people talk about literal resurrection and life after death.

From your perspective, life is hard, and you don't know how it will all turn out.

I want you to meet three people this morning.

I want you to see the real struggles they lived with.

I want you to see life from their perspective.

AND I want you to see how **one fact** so radically altered their perspectives that it changed their lives forever.

In the 20th chapter of the Gospel of John we see the record of the first person I want you to meet.

It was early on a Sunday morning, in fact it was still dark.

A woman named Mary, originally from the small city of Magdala, went out to a cemetery just outside the city walls of Jerusalem.

On Friday of that week she had stood nearby on a hill known to people as “the skull” and watched with deepening grief as Jesus died.

You can only know the grief she experienced if you have lost a loved one and you have stood by their bedside and watched their breathing finally stop for good.

Numbed with sadness, Mary found her way to the gravesite that morning expecting to somehow be let into the burial cave so she could put more spices on the body.

That was a way of honoring the dead, just as we put flowers on a grave.

What she saw when she reached the grave only intensified her sadness – the stone which had been placed over the entrance to the grave-cave had been moved.

Her fears were that someone had stolen the body in order to desecrate it more.

She just stood there and cried.

Death evokes powerful emotions.

Over the last three years, she had grown to love this man.

With many others she had come to believe that he truly was specially from God – but now he was dead.

She knew he was different from other people but he ended the same – dead!

Her grief was not only due to no longer being able to see him and talk to him but also due to the death of her dreams.

She really expected something to come of this Jesus and his talk of a new kingdom.

He had healed her months earlier and she was certain her troubles were then over – but now he was dead and all the old fears resurfaced.

No one had said it yet, but it was only a matter of time before her friends would tell her she just had to get over it – life goes on.

They would say, “Time heals”.

But time doesn’t heal death and the Jesus she loved was dead.

Do you know what dead means? Gone. Not here – not here ever again!

And when she thought of it the pain was unbearable.

As she turned around she saw someone she assumed was the cemetery caretaker.

He spoke to her but she didn’t really listen.

She asked him if he knew where the body had been taken.

What happened next was **one of those defining moments of life** that forever changes a person.

Mary heard and saw something that gave her a whole new perspective on life and death – one fact that forever changed her.

The person with her, next to that grave, spoke her name – “Mary”.

She heard him with her own ears, she saw him with her own eyes, and she touched him with her own hands – Jesus was alive.

Months earlier Jesus had said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”

Those words of Jesus were now believable in a literal way.

Not only was her loved one Jesus alive, but the implications for her and the others she loved were unmistakable and revolutionary.

Death does not end the relationships of people related to Jesus.

As a pastor I am involved in many funerals.

I think I can understand the tremendous difference between those who know what Mary learned that day and those who don't.

A year ago the Scott and Tomlin families lost children in what has become known as the Columbine tragedy.

I could not help but notice the sharp contrast between what those Christian families are saying today and much of what I heard in the remembrance services this past Thursday.

For most of the world, death is the end.

The best they seem to be able to talk about is that the dead somehow live on in our memories and in our lives made better by theirs.

Though the Scotts and Tomlins suffered as deeply as anyone else, they know with certainty they will see their beloved children again.

Why?

Because they know that Jesus, though he died, is alive – literally alive.

And because he is alive they can believe his promises.

Jesus promised that those who trust in him would be resurrected as he was, when Jesus comes again.

Those families, as many of you who have lost believing loved ones, have a radically different perspective on life and on death.

And that perspective is determined by one historical fact – Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus told Mary to go and tell the disciples what he had said
She did and she summarized all the theology that matters in one sentence: “I have seen the Lord.”

If Jesus is truly alive, death is not the end.

If Jesus is truly alive, my loved ones, who have followed Jesus but have died, are not gone forever.

Jesus resurrection gives you and me a whole different perspective on life and death.

Again, I urge you to remember what Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies.”

Jesus asked, “Do you believe this?”

Do YOU believe?

Mary was the first witness to the fact that Jesus rose from the dead – will you accept her testimony?

That truth radically altered Mary’s perspective – and it will radically alter yours.

II. The next people I would like you to meet are ten of Jesus’ disciples.

Again it is in the Gospel of John chapter 20 that tells us what happened.

It was the evening of that same Sunday.

The disciples were together, except for Thomas.

The disciples locked the doors because of their fear of the authorities.

After all – from the disciples’ perspective, Jesus had been killed, and his disciples might be next.

If Jesus was considered a felon, they guessed there were also.

Not only were these men living in fear for their lives but they also felt like fools.

These men had invested three years of their lives in this venture.

They believed Jesus, they saw great potential – a great future.

But now, what a waste? What fools they had been.

What would they do now? How do they start over?

They are at a point in their lives when they are absolutely directionless – everything they had planned had gone down the tubes. They were fools.

Not only are they felons and fools but they are also failures.

Most of them couldn’t forget the fact that when the going got rough three days before, they had run like scared schoolboys.

The person they loved most in the world was arrested and then executed and they did nothing but hide.

They failed the most important relationship in their lives.

Here they were - a washed up band of young fearful felons, fools and failures.

But what happened next was one of those defining moments that forever changes a person.

Those disciples saw something that changed their whole perspective on life.

With the door locked, Jesus came into the room and stood among them.

Can you picture it?

The conversation abruptly stops.

Mouths gape and eyes open wide.

It felt like their hearts stopped even as their pulses quickened.

Then Jesus spoke. "Peace be with you."

That sounds stilted to us, like a Kenneth Braunagh film.

But it was a common greeting in those days.

But it took on meaning as never before when they heard it come from the mouth of the one they had seen die.

As first one and then another dared, they stepped forward and touched him.

They crowded around him now as he showed them his nail pierced hands and impaled side.

There was no doubt – it was him – they were looking at Jesus – the one they knew was dead was here alive!

And they were overjoyed.

One fact completely changed their perspective on life and on themselves.

One truth moved them from fear to confidence.

No, they were not foolish for following Jesus and though they had failed miserably, they were forgiven.

They heard it from Jesus' own lips as he said it again, "Peace be with you."

It would become clearer in the days ahead that real peace with God had been paid for on the cross when Jesus died for their sins – even their failures.

Because he had died for them- they could be forgiven and they could be brought to a right relationship with God.

Now that is "peace"!

They are not fools, they are forgiven failures.

I want you to again think about the word that first characterized those disciples in that closed room – the word is "fear".

What fear do you live in?

Fear of failure in school, on your job, in life?

Fear of losing a relationship?

Fear of losing your health?

Fear of death?

One fact, one truth, understood and believed, can change that fear.
That one fact, that changes your entire perspective on all of life,
is that Jesus is alive.

And since he is alive, three things he taught affect the way I see life:

1. I am forgiven. Jesus death and resurrection proves that Jesus' death in my place was acceptable to God as payment for my sin.
My failures, my sins, won't ever be held against me, now or ever.

Every day is a new day, a new start by God's forgiving grace.

I don't have to live in the fear of failure.

2. Secondly, I have a future in this life that is worthwhile – one that matters.

I may not always enjoy good health.

I may not always have a good income.

I may sometimes be in a job that seems pointless.

I may have best friends turn against me.

But I know that Jesus is alive and that he loves me.

I can follow him and I can work for what is important to him – even if the rest of life falls apart.

Because he lives, I have a future here on earth that is worth living.

3. Thirdly, Jesus said that he is with me every step of the way – through life and through death into life after death.

Those disciples were eyewitnesses to the fact that Jesus is alive – will you believe their testimony?

III. The third person I would like you to meet is Thomas.

Again according to John 20, Thomas wasn't there when Jesus came into the room where the other disciples were hiding.

When he came back they told him they had seen the Lord alive.

But Thomas declared adamantly, "Unless I see the nail marks and put my hand on his side, I won't believe."

I suspect Thomas was no different than the others.

There was too much evidence that Jesus was dead.

Like us, Thomas hadn't seen many resurrections – but he had seen people die – he had seen Jesus die.

We see people die.

We see the affects of earthquakes, floods, tornados and many other tragedies public and private and people die.

Believe in resurrection? Not really. At least not literally.

It happened a week later on a Sunday and this time Thomas was with the others.

It was one of those defining moments that forever changes a person's life.

Thomas was given a whole new perspective on life.

Jesus came and stood in front of him.

I can imagine that this time everyone else started to move to greet Jesus, but then they stepped back leaving only Jesus and Thomas standing in the center of the room.

Thomas' mouth gaped open, his eyes were transfixed.

His heart stopped and beat faster both at the same time.

Then Jesus spoke: "Thomas".

Then without anyone telling Jesus what Thomas had said earlier, Jesus said, "Look, touch my hands and side – stop being a doubting person and believe."

The evidence was overwhelming.

He had heard Mary say SHE had seen him.

He had heard his friends say THEY had seen him.

And now HE had seen for himself.

And when that fact sank into his mind and heart, he couldn't help but declare what welled up on his tongue: "My Lord and my God!"

Some of you might think you are sitting on the fence on this idea of resurrection.

You've aren't ready to say you are an atheist but you aren't ready to say you believe these things either.

Your motto has always been to leave your options open.

But there is no in between. You're either a believer or you're not.

You are either trusting that Jesus is the Messiah, the risen Christ or you aren't.

The witnesses have testified.

The evidence is in.

Jesus is alive.

The writer of the Gospel of John wrote, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in his name."

Jesus is alive and that truth changes everything.

For Mary it turned her grief into peace.

For the disciples it turned their fear into joy.

For Thomas it turned his skepticism into confidence.

Do you believe?

The most important question is, "Will you believe?"